THE HIERARCHY OF STATES

Reform and resistance in the international order

IAN CLARK

Assistant Director of Studies in International Relations and Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

First published 1989
Reprinted 1991, 1993

The hierarchy of states: reform and resistance in the international order succeeds and replaces *Reform and resistance in the international order*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1980 (hard covers 0 521 229987; paperback 0 521 29763 X)

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Clark, Ian, 1949 Mar. 14–.
The hierarchy of states: reform and resistance in the international order. – (Cambridge studies in international relations; 7)
1. Foreign relations, 1815–1990 .
I. Title. II. Clark, Ian, 1949 Mar. 14–.
Reform and resistance in international order.
327'.09'034.

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Clark, Ian, 1949–.
The hierarchy of states: reform and resistance in the international order / Ian Clark.
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in international relations; 7)
Rev. ed. of: Reform and resistance in the international order. 1980
Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 0 521 37252 6. – ISBN 0 521 37861 3 (pbk.)
1. International relations. 2. World politics – 19th century.
3. World politics – 20th century.
I. Clark, Ian, 1949–. Reform and resistance in the international order. II. Title. III. Series.
JX1315.C57 1989.
327'.09–dc19 89–539 CIP

ISBN 0 521 37252 6 hard covers
ISBN 0 521 37861 3 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2001

CE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE 'WHIG' AND 'TORY' INTERPRETATIONS

The purpose of this book is to analyse the nature of the hierarchical state system, both in terms of theoretical accounts of its workings and a historical examination of its operational principles since 1815. Its principal focus will be upon the nature of international order and its potential for reform. It seeks to shed some light on the questions raised by Meinecke: 'is this no more than a continual movement to and fro? Or do any organic developments take place here? How far is statecraft timeless, in general, and how far is it changeable and capable of development?'[1] What have been peoples' expectations of the international order and to what extent have they been realised?

These issues will be approached by examining two inter-related dialectics. The first is an intellectual or 'ideological' one between the utopian proponents of reform and the realist advocates of continuing power-political practices. The second is a historical one, involving attempts to implement international order in practice, and is a dialectic between the pursuit of reform and the inherent propensities towards hierarchy and dominance within the system. In terms of this latter, the major issue to emerge is whether it is the hierarchy of states which must be restructured for reform to take place or, alternatively, whether hierarchy is not itself a necessary constituent of international order and a clear demarcation of hierarchical roles evidence of the attainment of reform.

The terms of the ideological dialectic have been much wider than those of the historical: while the intellectual exploration of the issues of international order has encompassed not only reforms within the current international order but also the transformation of the current state system to incorporate world order concerns, in practice the historical dialectic has been confined to attempts to develop regulatory diplomatic procedures and, even more narrowly, to a 'toing and froing' between concert and balance practices among the Great Powers themselves. Nonetheless, although much more wide-ranging

in its intent, the intellectual speculation about the potentiality for reform of the international order helps us to understand both the impulse to reform, and its limited impact, in the actual conduct of international relations. Taking both the ideological and the historical dimensions collectively, we may accordingly distinguish a 'whig' and a 'tory' interpretation of international history, the former of which is conspicuously progressive and the latter cyclical when not actually regressive.

The historical survey will trace the evolution of the international order since 1815 and there may be significance attached to that year from whichever perspective it is viewed. One of the conspicuous features of the post-Napoleonic settlement was that it, in Holbraad's words, 'introduced divisions in the hierarchy of states more marked than those that had existed before'.[2] This can either be viewed positively as the commencement of a more conscious phase in the Great Power management of the international system, or negatively as the final *de jure* recognition of the inequalities that had always existed *de facto* in the balance of power system. After all, a system of states organised in terms of disparities in power had been intrinsically a hierarchical arrangement: to bestow legitimacy upon this situation was simply to draw additional attention to this characteristic of the state system. Paradoxically, however, the more formal articulation of a hierarchical order, associated with the concert system, has frequently been regarded as an early and significant effort consciously to reform the international order. To that extent, both utopians and realists have seen virtue, albeit for different reasons, in a hierarchy of states.

The description of the state system as hierarchical should not be understood in too precise a sense. Waltz has used the term to define a structural ordering principle of a political system and, in this sense, it is to be contrasted with an anarchic order.[3] The present work employs the term in the less specialised sense of meaning a social arrangement characterised by stratification in which, like the angels, there are orders of power and glory and the society is classified in successively subordinate grades. This hierarchy is commonly assigned in terms of politico-strategic power, yielding the traditional groupings of Great Powers, medium powers, and small powers. It may equally be described in economic terms, yielding the stratification into first, third and fourth worlds. Outside a statist perspective, it may be analysed in terms of centres or cores, semi-peripheries, and peripheries. Its key theme is that disparities in capability are reflected, more or less formally, in the decision making of the society of states. In this sense, although Waltz's dichotomy between anarchy and hierarchy can be

understood, the description of the state system as hierarchical in this book is not intended to deny its 'self-help' anarchical characteristics: hierarchy, thus viewed, collectivises decision making within the rank of Great Powers while retaining the anarchical form of politics as between that rank and the others. From the viewpoint of the smaller states, power politics is in no way diminished.

In the survey of historical efforts to reform international order since 1815, the limited scope of attempts to redesign the international order will be made apparent. Indeed, so narrow are the confines within which this has been attempted that it becomes almost misleading to speak of 'reform of the international order'. At the very most, there have been attempts to have the Great Powers subscribe to limited 'group norms' in terms of which the Powers might conduct their management of the international system; actual efforts to reform the system do not seem to have gone beyond this limited goal and, even here, as will be seen, success has been sporadic and largely non-cumulative. In fact, therefore, when we speak of historical attempts to reform the international order, we should perhaps more accurately refer to attempts to implement certain fairly minimal 'regulatory' mechanisms.[4]

One is struck, therefore, both by the magnitude of the reaction against the prevailing international order, at times when it has experienced dramatic crises, as also by the minimal impact of this on the actual practices of international diplomacy. Hinsley accurately conveys this rich ambivalence:

> At the end of every war since the end of the eighteenth century, as had never been the case before, the leading states made a concerted effort, each one more radical than the last, to reconstruct the system on lines that would enable them, or so they believed, to avoid a further war . . . These initiatives are as characteristic and distinctive of the operation of the system as are the dynamics of its wars. So is the fact that they all came to nothing.[5]

How are we to account for the disparity between the intellectual speculation about reform and the limited achievements of historical practice? In a discussion of the concept of international order, one writer distinguishes between two main approaches to understanding that term.[6] He considers order, first, as 'process' and, secondly, as 'substance'. According to this distinction, order in the first sense

> is essentially formal in character. To satisfy this criterion a society does not have to achieve certain substantive goals or standards. Instead, the emphasis is on means rather than ends, on the manner of behaviour rather than its content, on the mode rather than the quality of life.

Order, in the second sense,

> is a matter not of form but of substance. It is not enough, the argument runs, for things to be done in an ordered way. It is also necessary that what is done should be such as to merit the word orderly. The essence or the effect of action is what counts not the existence of recognised processes for its execution.

It would be misleading to assert that the ideological debate has been about order as substance whereas the history has been about order as process: clearly, world government could be regarded as either a substantive end or as a processual means and to that extent the distinction must break down. However, with this caveat in mind, there does seem to be some point in saying that in the history of practical attempts to reform international order, the focus has not gone beyond that of diplomatic 'processes' in an attempt to develop improved regulative systems. In contrast, the corpus of international-order theorising is very much concerned with the substantive goal of creating conditions for the 'good life' for individual human beings.

How then would we describe the 'whig' and the 'tory' interpretations of international history? The whig interpretation has two principal facets: these are, first, a conviction that progress is possible and that it has in fact occurred and, secondly, a belief that the present is the culmination of history and that the past can be understood as sequential stages in the process of arrival at this destination. The essentials of such a historical perspective were long since admirably set out, and criticised, by Herbert Butterfield, who argued that the whig historians had an over-riding tendency 'to emphasise certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present'.[7] He summarised in these words:

> The total result of this method is to impose a certain form upon the whole historical story, and to produce a scheme of general history which is bound to converge beautifully upon the present – all demonstrating throughout the ages the working of an obvious principle of progress.[8]

This is not the place to enter upon a lengthy exegesis of the notion of progress and what it might mean in relation to international order, but a few comments are required. Progress has been defined as 'irreversible ameliorative change'.[9] The central question is, of course, what would constitute improvement or amelioration in the context of a discussion of international order? Some might set their sights low and aim for little more than the 'humanising' of power-political processes; some might measure progress in relation to the transcendence of the

present state system and its replacement by some form of centralised authority; others again might think of international order in full-blown terms as an idealised world order in which all human values are realised.

How then can a whig interpretation of progress in international relations, or its tory refutation, be substantiated? One source has suggested that theories of political progress can be grouped in five categories, each of which provides a different 'end-goal' or yardstick in terms of which the occurrence of progress, or its absence, might be measured. These are listed as being: (1) a trend towards control over man's selfish or 'unsocial' nature; (2) a trend towards larger and larger political units; (3) a trend towards rational efficiency in social and political organisation; (4) an advance towards greater equality; (5) an advance towards greater freedom.[10] Each of these would clearly be problematic in any political context and, collectively, they are certainly so if an attempt is made to apply them to a discussion of international relations, as a cursory glance would readily indicate. The state, to the extent that it represents a 'general' interest may be thought to realise the first goal of controlling man's unsocial nature but it is itself the expression of a 'particular' interest within an international framework. As regards the second point, it is not clear whether, or in what sense, a trend towards larger political units is in itself a desirable goal or whether, in an international context, the trend towards a global political community should be encouraged merely as a contribution to the third goal, that of rational efficiency. If the latter, the argument is far from self-evidently valid. This third, in turn, begs all kinds of questions about rationality and about the place of efficiency in the scale of human values. As for the last two, the tensions between the ideals of equality and freedom have often been noted and these are aggravated at the international level where, to make the most obvious point, the equality of the lesser states can only be secured by curtailing the freedom of the larger ones. In any event, some international-order theorists would deny that the application of principles of equality is desirable in international relations and would subscribe to the view that, in an otherwise anarchical milieu, hierarchy serves the international community better than equality.

The terms in which 'progressive' change within the international order has been affirmed and denied are, at best, uncertain and far from clear. Nonetheless, it is around these opposed interpretations that the whig and the tory schools have congregated.

The essentials of the whig interpretation have already been suggested but may be pulled together at this point. It is a progressive

doctrine and argues that successive phases of international order reveal an improvement on the stage that preceded it: the League of Nations was an improvement upon the Concert of Europe and the United Nations was likewise an improvement upon the League. Similarly, the democratic context in which foreign policy is now conducted represents an improvement upon the aristocratic context of yore and the present international order is itself preferable for that reason. Moreover, the significant aspect of international political life is not the number, and the intensity, of the wars it has experienced but rather the progressive articulation of human revulsion against these wars. There may be profound disparities in standards of living between rich and poor sectors of the globe but the problem is accepted as a responsibility of the international community to a hitherto unprecedented extent. In these various ways, the international order of today is assumed to be an improvement upon the international order of 1815.

The second strand of the whig interpretation is its tendency to read history 'backwards'. What is important is the present and our interest in past international practices exists only to the extent that they explain how the present situation was reached. As Hinsley has observed 'vast efforts have been made, innumerable books have flowed, from the wish to cite Dubois or Dante, Cruce or Sully, as forerunners of the League of Nations or United Europe or the United Nations experiment'.[11] Or, as it has been expressed in one whiggish sentiment, 'the United Nations is the present manifestation of the natural legacy, passed from one generation to the next, of the continuous search for the warless world of peace and security'.[12]

According to the whig view of international history, the modern is the goal and we study history to understand the progressive unfolding of the design immanent within the historical process itself. A clear example of such reasoning can be found in the following passage, written at a time when it was difficult to maintain faith in a progressive account of the world:

> The free people of the earth are today in a situation in which there is no survival for them except as United Nations. The crisis-situation is a result of historical development of the dynamism of the forces of democracy, industrial technology, and nationalism, which in mutual support and conflict have shaped the background out of which the crisis grew. But in their historical texture the possible solution of the crisis is delineated. Democracy, technology, nationalism, all point toward harmonization in the United Nations.[13]

The same author quotes the text of the resolution, for a Declaration of the Federation of the World, adopted by the Senate of the state of

North Carolina in 1941 which is a classic statement of the whig profession of faith:

> Just as feudalism served its purpose in human history and was superseded by nationalism, so has nationalism reached its apogee in this generation and yielded its hegemony in the body politic to internationalism. It is better for the world to be ruled by an international sovereignty of reason, social justice and peace than by diverse national sovereignties organically incapable of preventing their own dissolution by conquest.[14]

It may be worth pointing out that there are some striking resemblances between the whig interpreters of international order and the early school of 'modernisation' theory which played such a conspicuous part within the American political-science fraternity in the early 1960s. To the latter, the 'developing' countries of the third world were to the modern democratic state what the primitive international political system was to the one which has progressively unfolded over the past century or so. As one critic has said of the modernisation school:

> Political modernity is representative democracy, and the practical achievement of the democratic ideal has reached its highest point in the United States of America. The process of modernisation, in less advanced areas of the world, is therefore very simply to be understood as one of 'transition' in which backward polities will grow increasingly to resemble the American model.[15]

In these terms, and according to the whig perspective, the international polity is but a 'developing' system writ large.

The tory interpretation stands in stark contrast to the foregoing account. The characteristic features of international political life are the same now as they were several centuries ago: in contrast to the emphasis upon progress, the tory belabours the theme of constancy or, if in a black mood, even gives expression to a regressive view of the world.

The spirit of the tory view is well captured in the following denunciation of the idealist vision of international politics, a speech delivered at Glasgow University by F. E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead, in 1923:

> For as long a time as the records of history have been preserved human societies passed through a ceaseless process of evolution and adjustment. This process has been sometimes pacific, but more often it has resulted from warlike disturbance. The strength of different nations, measured in terms of arms, varies from century to century. The world continues to offer glittering prizes to those who have stout hearts and sharp swords; it is therefore extremely improbable that

> the experience of future ages will differ in any material respect from that which has happened since the twilight of the human race.[16]

Where there are signs of change and of improvement, the tory remains convinced that this is only at the level of appearance. Underneath, the reality remains the same. Thus, as one tory has argued, when the international system of the twentieth century replaced the balance of power with a formal regulatory mechanism in the shape of a universal international organisation, all this did was to create 'power politics in disguise'.[17]

The tory interpretation has yet another twist which makes its judgement even more depressing and yields the note of regression in some of its pronouncements. The point is that, in the tory assessment, attempts to improve upon a balance system, as a form of regulatory device, not only do not realise the expectations of the whigs but can in fact be positively harmful – they lead not only to power politics in disguise but indeed to a hamstrung and inefficacious brand of power politics which leaves us with the worst of both worlds. Thus it was Hedley Bull's considered opinion that 'the attempt to apply the Grotian or solidarist formula has had the consequence not merely that the attempt to construct a superior world order is unsuccessful, but also that classical devices for the maintenance of order are weakened or undermined'.[18] In terms of this perspective, the tragedy of the inter-war period is explained not only by the failure of the League of Nations but by its hindering of the balance tactics which might otherwise have secured a fragile peace.

This is not to suggest that there is no middle ground between the two interpretations. On the contrary, most analysts prefer the safer ground in between to either of the two extremes so far presented. Inis Claude might be taken as representative of the 'agnostic' position, which sees an essential ambivalence in virtually all developments in the field of international order:

> Certainly there is no guarantee that international organisation will be successful. It is easy to exaggerate the progress that has been made; supporters of international organisation are often tempted to take too seriously the ostensible gains that exist only on paper . . . But it is equally easy – and perilous – to adopt a pessimism which refuses to recognise the advances that have been made and denies the hypothesis that a meaningful opportunity exists for gradual taming of power, harmonizing of interests, and building of allegiance to the ideal of a world fit for human life.[19]

The framework of the discussion thus far suggests a dualism in the history of thought about international relations, the field dividing into

utopians and realists, or whigs and tories. In terms of the potential for reform within the international order, such a dichotomy is warranted. However, once we begin to analyse the characteristic structures and processes of international relations, the traditions of thought proliferate beyond those two central schools. Indeed, as Chapter 2 will seek to demonstrate, the idealist/realist debate is no longer the most significant 'fault-line' within the theory of international relations. The list of traditions or perspectives is seemingly endless, some preferring to categorise the field into liberalism, socialism and realism,[20] others employing terms such as pluralist, realist and structuralist.[21]

The significance of such categorisations is twofold. First, they add new issues to the agenda of order and compel the analyst to step outside the framework of the state system and the traditional concerns of statecraft. A review of the implications of doing so will be attempted in Chapter 2. Secondly, they suggest alternative understandings of the essential nature of international relations and, in focussing attention upon new actors and processes operating outside the framework of states, add to the complexity of any endeavour to reform the system. This in itself helps to explain why the historical record of reform is so much more limited than the scope of intellectual speculation: while theorists have sought for new intellectual frameworks, the diplomats have operated within the old, even when they have sought to reform some of its practices.

The first part of the book is an elaboration of the whig and tory ideologies in relation to international order and its potential for reform. Moreover, it singles out two philosophers of the eighteenth century as representatives of the two streams of thought, Kant being presented as the whig and Rousseau, however unlikely, as the tory. It is fitting that the book should focus upon two writers who expressed their thoughts upon reforming the international order on the eve of the period when the study takes up its historical narrative. It has been said that 'whoever studies contemporary international relations cannot avoid hearing, behind the clash of interests and ideologies, a kind of permanent dialogue between Rousseau and Kant'.[22] To the extent that this is so, this book seeks to continue the dialogue and in its survey of the history of international order since 1815, and attempts to reform it, to suggest which of the two might be having the better of the argument.